

News Letter

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THE SOUTH AMERICAN WAY OF DEALING WITH PROPAGANDA FILMS

A tug o' war in South America, between American and German motion pictures, has the Americans at great disadvantage because of typical Nazi tactics employed. Diplomatic pressure and willing Quislings are being used successfully to prevent the showing of American films in South America which do not meet with Axis approval. United States diplomats, unaccustomed to the use of gangster methods, are in no position to retaliate.

The need for Western Hemisphere solidarity is great. Good will ambassadors are sent to South America. Publications preach that the countries of the Americas must stand together or hang separately. Experts agree that American motion pictures have done more than any other single factor in the past, in promoting better understanding between the South and the North.

While every Nazi film contains propaganda, American cinema producers are smeared and berated by isolationist ostriches for making "warmongering pictures". If the American good-neighbor policy is to be more than a theory, South Americans must be taught the dogma of democracy, and must be convinced

of the wickedness of the Axis new order. True, that would require propaganda, but is America to stand idly by while Axis agents continue to plant seeds which, once in bloom, will create additional headaches for American diplomats?

When Senators Nye, Wheeler, Clark, et al, begin their investigation of the American motion picture industry, the following significant facts should be borne in mind:

Although Nazi propaganda in South America has been most prevalent and effective through the media of the press and radio, advertisement of the Nazi way of life, via films, is also taking on serious proportions. German efforts in this direction are twofold: (1) The



Argentine Germans flock to the "San Martin", one of Buenos Aires' leading movie houses, to see a German program. This theater is owned by A. Amoroso, known to be an admirer of Mussolini.

distribution of Nazi educational shorts, newsreels and features by the German embassies in the various countries; and (2) attempts by German diplomatic officials to influence the governments to ban anti-Nazi American films.

In addition, UFA -- the largest German film company -- sends to South America many "educational" movies which are usually shown at private gatherings by invitation to Nazi members of the German colonies, under the auspices of diplomatic and consular representatives. They are loaned free to movies, schools and public meetings. Some of them show German penetration of, and influence in, Latin America; others deal with the life of the large German population in Chile, Argentine and Brazil; still others depict the Nazi control of commerce and industry in certain regions.

In order to overcome the Latin-American's preference for films in the English language -- far more popular than those in the German tongue -- the Hispano-Film Company was established in Berlin for the express purpose of producing, with the aid of Falangists, Spanish-language motion pictures to be distributed in South and Central America. A number of Spanish actors and actresses were brought into Germany to take part in such films. Among the first was "The Barber of Seville".

Much effort was spent in promoting "The Liberation of the Alkazar", which received a prize at the last German-Italian film week in Venice. Special literature (illustration on page 6) was gotten out in German, going specifically to German settlers -- thus showing that in truth, the Nazis were the real promoters of the film though it was offered as a Spanish nationalist production.

The Great Dictators in Argentina

ARGENTINA Nazi agents are concentrating on film propaganda in a vigorous campaign. Since they have not been very successful until recently, one Hans Biester was sent to Buenos Aires from Germany in January, 1941. Past association with the Argentine motion picture firm, Terra, fits him for the task; so does his command of the Spanish language, perfected in Spain where he arranged for the exhibition of German film productions, especially UFA, in 400 theatres. The new campaign is evidently aimed to influence the Argentine producing companies, and to obtain wider distribution of German films.

Nazis made several vain attempts in the latter field a year ago, one campaign seeking a major theatre for feature films, and another aiming for wide exhibition for UFA newsreels. They tried to present German films at the *Ideal Cine*, a first run theatre in the center of the show district, but were rejected by the owners, who were satisfied with American products. Herr Biester then arranged for the building of a newsreel theatre, the *Cineac*, which was to be primarily an auditorium for German films. The theatre presents national and American newsreels and cartoons, but most of the programs are devoted to UFA reels. Typical is the following offering: A Donald Duck cartoon and three newsreels, namely, a short film on the damage in London, another on the armament program in the United States, and an extremely long newsreel of Hitler reviewing his troops and mechanized units. Such a bill of fare is designed to persuade the casual observer that Berlin is crumbling, that the United States is frantically arming, and that Germany has the greatest army of all time.

Nazi newsreels are occasionally shown in Buenos Aires neighborhood theatres, to which they are either loaned free or rented at nominal prices. These

films are delivered by air and consigned, according to labels on the cases, to the *Banco Germanico*, a German bank closely connected with the German Embassy. They are brought into the country from Lisbon by Pan-American Airways along the west coast of Africa, to avoid British censorship at Trinidad.

Nazi Purse Strings Loosened

Efforts to influence the Argentine film industry were made by extending loans through the *Banco Germanico*. At first, easy terms were granted for the purchase of films (as well as chemicals) of which there was a plentiful supply. At present, however, the supply is limited owing to German inability to deliver in South America, leaving Eastman Kodak as the major supplier. Considerable penetration in the producing field has been achieved by German firms. AGFA, a German firm, formerly aided local producers heavily; and the Argentine motion picture trade weekly, *Cine-Prensa*, reported that AGFA was the largest creditor in several bankruptcies and re-organizations of local producing companies, with the *Banco Germanico* playing an important part.

More recent reports indicate that the situation in Argentina is aggravated by flourishing Axis movies in outlying parts of the country, where small halls were hired to show films, and trucks travel around circulating cinematic propaganda. For these audiences, the Germans have selected their terror movies -- pictures of the campaigns in Poland and in Western Europe.

The part played by the Fascists in Argentina in forcing the authorities to ban "The Great Dictator" is indicative of the tremendous influence of Hitler agents, abetted by the followers of Mussolini. Last December, the film was to be shown to the National Board of Censors. In the belief that it would be approved at least in part, the distributor, United Artists, Inc., advertised its opening in three houses beginning January 2. Following instructions from German officials, the Nazi-dominated newspaper, *El Pamperio*, demanded, on December 23rd, that The Great Dictator be banned from Argentine theatres. It had just been ousted from Brazil by the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (which has charge of censorship in Rio de Janeiro) on the ground that the picture was contrary to the Brazilian concept of strict neutrality and might cause disturbances in the theatres.

Several days after the Nazi paper went into action, it was announced by the Argentine Foreign Office that The Great Dictator was banned in Buenos Aires by Mayor Carlos Alberto Pueyrredon following the protest by the Italian Ambassador, Raffaele Boscarelli, that it "attacked the Italian regime". The municipal film censorship board previously authorized the showing of the picture while confirming an earlier ban on "Confessions of a Nazi Spy". In June, 1941, it was learned that the Buenos Aires City Council, complying with the wishes of a large part of the population, had decided to permit the public showing of the Chaplin film, thus reversing the Mayor's order. But only eleven days later, on June 25th, a decree forbade showing of the film throughout Argentine. The preamble to this decree justifies the ban by saying:

The diplomatic representatives of two countries, with which ours maintains relations of friendship, solicited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a friendly fashion to prohibit the exhibition of the film because they consider that it wounds the sentiments of the respective nations.

On June 7th, the Buenos Aires Municipal Censorship Board also requested the Mayor to forbid the showing of "Pastor Hall", based on the life of Reverend Martin Niemoeller in a German concentration camp, because it was "offen-

sive to one of the belligerent countries". This was done.

What further proof is necessary of the great pressure exerted by the Axis in South America?

"You Are Cordially Invited To Attend....Or Else"

CHILE Nazi propaganda films figure prominently in Chile where they have been exhibited virtually without hindrance. Two Santiago theatres display Nazi films regularly, including "Baptism of Fire", the picturization of the invasion of Poland which, by creating an impression of the German military machine's power, attempts to break down the spirit of resistance among potential foes. That the Chilean Army shows German films to conscripts speaks for itself!

Wherever Nazi films are shown, all Germans and German-Chileans are ordered by Nazi party officers, operating through local consuls, to attend. If a German or a Chilean of German descent refuses to go, he is blacklisted. If he is a business man, his business is boycotted. If he is a worker, he loses his job. Furthermore, he is threatened with reprisals against his relatives in the Reich if he refuses to attend these propaganda sessions. Last March, the German Embassy in Santiago invited a number of Chilean officials to a private showing of "Victory in the West", depicting the fall of France. This was the first time this film was presented in the Americas.

In contrast to this display of cooperation with sponsors of Axis pictures, United States films were banned and censored wherever possible. "Confessions of a Nazi Spy" was passed by the censor but banned by the Provincial Governor of Santiago as likely to create public disorder. "Nurse Edith Cavell" was permitted by the government and was shown in Santiago, but not in Southern Chile because German communities there raised funds to pay theatres to boycott it.

The Great Dictator caused quite a controversy before permission was granted to show it in censored form. Long before the premiere, a battle was waged between Axis diplomats and the distributor, United Artists. The Germans, unwilling to dignify the film by an official protest, were satisfied with a statement by Wilhelm von Pochhammer, German Embassy counsellor in Santiago, that the showing of the film was extremely unpleasant for German residents in Chile. Besides, a great deal of unofficial pressure was brought to bear on the Foreign Minister and the Governor of Santiago Province by important German and Italian nationals.

The picture was eventually shown to the public after some cutting, although the original version was approved by Arturo Olavarria, Minister of the Interior. Scenes, concerning Napaloni's wife and those depicting some of the more extreme physical violence, were deleted to avoid "hurting the feelings" of the German and Italian colonists. Up to the last moment, the film risked banning if any serious incidents developed, but none did. The local authorities assigned large squads of special police to the four Santiago theatres where it was shown. The principal rumpus was caused at one theatre by a group of youths who greeted theatre-goers with cries of "Long Live Chile!" and "Down With Chaplin!"

Finally, in an attempt to do away with such disturbances, Chile prohibited, for the duration of the war, the showing of motion pictures having any bearing on the ideologies of belligerent nations or casting reflections on their principles or methods of government. This announcement was made following a meeting at the office of the Governor of Santiago Province, attended by

all distributors of foreign films in the country.

....A Clown May Speak Seriously....

PERU Nazi propaganda in Peru, although less successful than in other South American countries, seems to have some effect on the movies shown there. Germans exhibit their propaganda films by inviting important Peruvians and diplomats to private showings. German Minister Dr. Willy Nokel spends much time protesting against American and British films, which he regards as anti-totalitarian. His complaints caused the banning of such American pictures as "Confessions of a Nazi Spy", "Espionage Agent" and "March of Time -- Refugees of Today and Tomorrow". There were indications that The Great Dictator would be spared the fate of the other films, for on January 30th, 1941, the Senate passed a resolution to ask the Foreign Minister to reject any petition that might be made which would place obstacles in the way of exhibiting the Chaplin film. Although the Peruvian Government declares itself firmly pro-United States, minor proof of Fascist successes can be seen, for The Great Dictator cannot be shown in Lima's movie houses.

On January 27th, the Chaplin film was banned in Paraguay by the Mayor of Asuncion, who said the picture was "unfriendly" to local Italians and Germans. Spokesmen at United Artists there expressed surprise at the Mayor's actions, for the film had not yet been booked for showing in any city in Paraguay.

Ecuador is an encouraging exception for, despite objections by the German and Italian Legations, it was decided to allow the showing of The Great Dictator. *Prospero*, a local columnist writing in *Universo*, stated that Charlie Chaplin is justified because:

When the great mass of intellectuals maintain a cowardly silence in the face of the present historic crisis, a clown has the right to speak seriously and to make the serious ones ridiculous.

THE ITALIAN EMPIRE
THROUGH GERMAN EYES

"Die Farbige Front; Hinter den Kulissen der Weltpolitik (The Colored Front; Behind the Scenes of World Politics) von einem ungenannten Verfasser" (Anonymous), Berlin/Leipzig, 1936. "The fact that the Negus left his country seems to justify those who believe they can accept Mussolini's declaration that the case of Ethiopia is settled once and for all in favor of Italy. But the case is not settled. The new conquest will demand enormous efforts from Italy. Will she be permitted to keep permanently what today she claims to have conquered once and for all?" (From the Introduction, p.5)

"You have been able to observe the role which eroticism plays in the life of the Italians. They do not seem to be quite sure that they are able to make heroes of this Italian youth. But this youth is after pretty young women like mad, no matter what the color of their skin. They want to show this youth what pretty women await them in Abyssinia -- a nice kind of propaganda for the Abyssinian campaign." (In Italy the photo of a naked Ethiopian woman had been distributed in hundreds of thousands of copies.) (p. 260)

From a conversation between two Blackshirts:

"What else could we do but come out here? If one does not volunteer, one is looked upon as a shirker and loses every chance of a future career. Well, good old De Bono will see to it that we Blackshirts are not treated too harshly." (p. 626)

Right: German notice of "Liberation of Alkazar". Below: Scene from "Ohm Kreuger", seen in South America, showing parade of Boers and banner reading "Down With England".

Das
Heldenlied
vom
ALKAZAR



Above: Scene from German film, "Ohm Kreuger", bearing the caption "Graves, Crosses, Wretchedness, Barbed Wire, Disease, and Hunger are the symbols of concentration camps, in which Englishmen permit wives and children of Boers to waste away." Of late, Germans have stressed in their propaganda that concentration camps were invented by the British, and used for the first time during the Boer War. Left: Dramatic scene from "The Liberation of Alkazar". Every reel of this picture is unadulterated Axis propaganda. The film is widely shown in South America.

At right is a scene from a German film "Königin der Haffen" (Queen of the Arms). Many pictures of this type are shown in countries south of the border. Latins are impressed by the irresistible force of the Teuton War Machine. Meanwhile, U.S. efforts to show our side are seriously hampered at home by Isolationists.

